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Supply management in American public administration: Towards an academic discipline?

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the development of supply management in the U.S. to assess its progress towards academic disciplinary status. A comparison of the fields of business administration and public administration indicates that supply management is more developed in the former than in the latter, which inhibits its disciplinary status. Various reasons for this uneven development in the two fields are explored. The paper argues that a paradigm shift must occur for public supply management, which will re-orient it around the concept of the public interest. This will require public supply professionals to participate strategically in public policy-making in order to ascertain and promote the public interest. A policy framework is used to illustrate this re-orientation and to suggest directions for further research.

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1. Introduction

This paper addresses the theme of the 18th Annual IPSERA Conference, *Supply Management—Towards an Academic Discipline?* Posed thus as an interrogative, the theme suggests that supply management has not yet achieved academic disciplinary status. It further suggests inquiry along at least two lines. First, normative inquiry would investigate value-laden questions such as whether supply management ought to be moved in that direction. Second, empirical inquiry would investigate topics such as the extent to which and ways in which supply management is moving toward or away from disciplinary status, the forces that either impede or enable such movement, and the extent to which these forces are amenable to intervention.

1.1. Purpose and method

In this paper, we focus on the latter line of inquiry. We assess the development of supply management in the United States in order to judge its progress towards and prospects for achieving academic disciplinary status. Specifically, we compare the disciplinary manifestations of supply management in the U.S. in two interdisciplinary academic fields—business administration (BA) and public administration (PA). Our analysis documents and compares the disciplinary evidence of supply management in BA and PA in four major areas: university curricula, textbooks,

scholarly journals and other disciplinary activities (e.g., scholarly societies, research centers). The methodology here is very simple, consisting mainly of supply management content reviews in samples of each of these areas.

This comparison of the evidence of academic disciplinary activities between the two fields indicates that supply management is far more developed in BA than in PA in the U.S. We then investigate potential reasons for this condition. Here we rely on scholars who have analyzed the development of supply management and of American PA. Their writings provide insights into those characteristics of supply management and PA which have made them less compatible, in a disciplinary sense, than supply management and BA.

Finally, we turn our focus to developing prescriptions for enhancing the study of supply management in American PA. Relying on scholars from public procurement, PA, and the policy sciences, we synthesize their concepts and conclusions around (1) the idea of the public interest and (2) a policy framework. If adopted widely in PA, these may promote supply management's advance toward academic disciplinary status.

To summarize, our approach is exploratory, conceptual, and directed mainly toward developing hypotheses to guide further research on the disciplinary status and direction of supply management, particularly as they pertain to its problematic status in American PA.

1.2. Assumptions, limitations, and scope

For the sake of convenience, we adopt several terminology conventions. We have already introduced the first convention,

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namely, using BA and PA to refer to the respective interdisciplinary academic fields. We use lower case words when referring to the operations, functions, and practice of business and public administration. Additionally, from this point forward, we use BA and PA to refer to those fields as they are evidenced in the U.S. Where discussion of those fields in an international or global context arises, we note that context specifically.

The second convention involves the terms *discipline* and *field* for which scholars have not established agreed-upon definitions and distinctions. In this paper, we use discipline to mean a branch of knowledge with formal educational and research programs and faculties at the university level, as well as scholarly societies, and peer-reviewed journals. We use the term fields to refer to areas of study that are made up of disciplines.

Third, we intentionally avoid bringing the notion of *professional status* in our analysis. The IPSERA conference theme emphasizes *academic discipline* rather than *profession*. While the two obviously share some features (e.g., the idea of specialized knowledge), they are different in significant ways (see for example Etzioni, 1969; Jackson, 1970; Friedson, 1986). Addressing the question of supply management's status as a profession would entail substantially different analysis than the question of its status as an academic discipline. Where appropriate, however, we do mention supply management professional activities (e.g., scholarly societies) in both BA and PA when those activities are relevant to disciplinary status.

Finally, for the purpose of this article, we will use the term *supply management* as defined by the Institute for Supply Management, ISM): the "identification, acquisition, access, positioning, management of resources and related capabilities the organization needs or potentially needs to attain its strategic objectives" (Carter and Choi, 2008, p. 2). According to ISM, components of supply management include "disposition/investment recovery, distribution, inventory control, logistics, manufacturing supervision, materials management, packaging, product/service development, purchasing/procurement, quality, receiving, strategic sourcing, transportation/traffic/shipping and warehousing" (Carter and Choi, 2008, p. 2). Other terms used in reference to the management of supplies and services include *procurement*, *contracting*, *acquisition*, *purchasing*, *outsourcing*, and *buying*. Our purposes in this paper do not require that we enforce rigorous definitions for or distinctions for these terms; thus we refer simply to supply management throughout most of the paper.

2. Supply management in BA

This section and the next will discuss supply management as an emerging discipline within the interdisciplinary fields of BA and PA. As mentioned above, there are a number of criteria – university curricula, academic textbooks, scholarly journals, other disciplinary activities – upon which disciplinary status may be judged. We will use these criteria to examine first BA, and then PA.

2.1. Supply management in BA: university curricula

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is considered the premier professional accrediting agency for business schools. Although the AACSB does not mandate any required curricula in its accreditation standards, the accreditation standards identify supply management as a topic typically found in general management degree programs. Specifically, the standards identify topics related to "creation of value through the integrated production and distribution of goods, services, and information (from acquisition of materials through production to distribution of products, services, and information)" (AACSB, 2008).

A review of the top 10 graduate business schools in the U.S. (as reported in the *U.S. News and World Report* (2008) annual rankings of U.S. universities) reflects that eight of 10 Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs offered in those schools include a core course in production/operations management (P/OM). We highlight the P/OM course simply because the standard P/OM course covers many supply management-related areas such as purchasing, outsourcing, supply chain management, forecasting, inventory management, logistics management, and production scheduling, to name just a few.

A review of the top 10 graduate business schools also shows that over half of the top 10 graduate MBA programs included electives that provided additional education in supply management. These electives included Coordinating and Managing Supply Chains, Global Value Chain Strategies, Negotiations, Retail Supply Chain Management, Supply Chain Design, Contracting, Inventory Management, and Supply Chain Management and Information Technology.

Finally, in addition to the MBA core and elective courses discussed above, we also see a significant number of formal degree programs with concentrations in supply management areas. The website for ISM identifies over one hundred bachelor degree programs and over one hundred master degree programs with concentrations in supply management. Also listed on the ISM website are certificate programs as well as a handful of doctorate degree programs in supply management areas (ISM, 2008).

2.2. Supply management in BA: textbooks, journals, and other disciplinary activities

Supply management-related topics are also well represented in survey courses in business administration and related textbooks. A review of the typical "Introduction to Business" textbook, which provides survey coverage of business administration topics, shows a consistent coverage of supply management concepts including purchasing, outsourcing, materials management and supply chain management. These topics are usually covered in the chapter on P/OM (see Ferrell et al., 2009; Jones, 2007; Nickels et al., 2010; Bovee et al., 2007).

We also see the continued publication of specialty textbooks in the field of supply management. These textbooks support the elective courses previously discussed and include titles such as *Supply Management* (Burt et al., 2010), *Purchasing and Supply Management* (Leenders and Fearon, 1997), *Supply Chain Management* (Fawcett et al., 2007), and *World Class Contracting* (Garrett, 2007).

There are several scholarly journals in the area of supply management. The ISM's *Journal of Supply Chain Management* reflects the current state of refereed journals in this area. Others related to supply management include *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics*, *International Journal of Logistics Management*, *Production and Operations Management Journal*, *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and *Journal of Contract Management*.

In addition to the scholarly journals, there are learned societies related to supply management, for example, the Operations Management division of the Academy of Management, the Production and Operations Management Society, and its College of Supply Chain Management.

Professional associations support supply management and related fields as well. ISM was founded in 1915 and is the largest supply management association in the world as well as one of the most respected. Its mission is to lead the supply management profession through its standards of excellence, research, promotional activities, and education (ISM, 2008). Other associations

related to supply management include the International Society of Logistics and the National Contract Management Association. Several research centers and institutes also support the supply management field. These include CAPS Research, a nonprofit research organization dedicated to supply and supply chain issues. CAPS is jointly sponsored by the ISM and Arizona State University. Both ISM and CAPS sponsor the annual North American Research and Teaching Symposium on Purchasing and Supply Chain Management.

As can be seen from the above discussion, supply management is well established in the field of BA and possesses many of the characteristics of a discipline. Our research identified graduate education curricula and courses in supply management, as well as textbooks, scholarly journals, learned societies, and professional associations, all within the realm of BA.

2.3. Supply management as a strategic enabler for profitability

Supply management's "traction" in BA is due to the well-documented relationship between the supply management function and a business organization's financial position and bottom line. Supply management-related activities, especially purchasing and contracting, affect sales and total ownership costs, thus having a major impact on an organization's return on investment (ROI) and bottom line (Burt et al., 2003, 2010; Leenders and Fearon, 1997). Today's supply management textbooks reflect the "profit-leveraged effect" and the "return-on-assets (ROA) effect" that the purchasing function has on the company's financial position (Burt et al., 2003, 2010; Leenders and Fearon, 1997).

To summarize this section, the roles of supply management in business and its strategic contributions to business success have been documented and made clear through the efforts of both scholars and practitioners (Smeltzer, 1998; Lester, 2000). Academic research, teaching, and professional activities continue to expand the theory and practice of supply management in the business realm. Thus, with respect to BA, we judge that supply management is near, if not already in possession of, disciplinary status.

3. Supply management in PA

We turn now to examine its influence in PA in the same four areas – university curricula, textbooks, journals, and other disciplinary activities – as above.

3.1. Supply management in PA: university curricula

A review of the top 10 universities in public affairs education (again, from the U.S. News and World Report (2008) annual rankings) reveals that no Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree program offered by these universities contains any core course in a supply management-related topic. Further, only two of these programs have even a single elective course related to supply management: New York University's single elective titled, "Contracting Out: Management and Policy Issues" and the University of Southern California's single elective, titled "Managed Health Care Contracting" in its Public Health Management MPA concentration.

A survey of selected MPA programs accredited by the National Association of Schools for Public Administration and Affairs (NASPAA), the premier accrediting body for PA programs in the U.S., reveals only a few Master's-level programs with required courses in supply management topics (NASPAA, 2008). George Washington University requires a course titled "Contracting Out and Public-Private Partnerships" in its Budgeting and Public

Finance MPA concentration, and the Naval Postgraduate School, which has an entire curriculum concentration in contracting, requires several courses in contract management and policy.

NASPAA's accreditation standards contain no requirements for curriculum components in supply management (NASPAA, 2008). The standards do require curriculum components in areas such as human resource management, budgeting and financial management, and information technology. The only NASPAA-accredited graduate program is at the Naval Postgraduate School which, as stated above, has a contracting concentration to prepare mid-grade military officers for positions in contract management.

To conclude this section on university curricula, we note that nothing has apparently changed since Khi Thai (2001, p. 41) noted: "Unfortunately, higher education institutions and educators have not recognized the educational needs of public procurement professionals...This author is not aware of any comprehensive public procurement program offered by any university in the United States."

3.2. Supply management in PA: textbooks, journals, and other disciplinary activities

PA "survey" textbooks are commonly used in introductory courses to expose students to the context of the field as well as to its important concepts, issues, and thinkers. A review of prominent survey textbooks in American PA reveals that most devote no attention to supply management. For example, Stillman's seventh edition (2004) of *Public Administration: Concepts and Cases* is silent on the subject. A few others, like the sixth edition of Denhardt and Denhardt's (2008) *Public Administration: An Action Orientation*, cover supply management topics such as procurement and contracting as part of material on public budgeting and financial management (more on this below). Others like Rainey (1997) address topics like privatization that are related to supply management. Similarly, Martin's (1989) annotated bibliography of American PA literature has several listings (e.g., surveys, case studies, policy analyses) under the heading of "Privatization vs. Contracting Out." There are, however, no listings related to supply management processes. Of the three works titled *Handbook of Public Administration* (Peters and Pierre, 2007; Rubin et al., 1998; Perry, 1996), each of which purports to be a comprehensive guide to the study and practice of PA, only Perry's contains entries on supply management topics. It is more common to see supply management topics covered in textbooks on public budgeting and financial management. For example, Smith and Lynch (2004), in *Public Budgeting in America*, cover purchasing and procurement as activities under "Property Management," which they name as an "important financial management topic" (p. 358). This reflects American PA's historical view of supply management functions falling under the purview of financial management. A mid-twentieth century textbook, *Municipal Finance Administration* (Institute for Training in Municipal Administration, 1955), published by the Institute for Training in Municipal Administration, states that "[p]urchasing may be properly classified as a fiscal function" (p. 367) in its chapter on "Purchasing and Storing." Additionally, the topic of defence procurement has long been a special topic of interest in textbooks dealing with national budgeting (Smithies, 1955; Wildavsky and Caiden, 2004), because of the large dollar amounts involved, the concomitant political interest, and recurring abuses, whether real or perceived.

Until roughly 2000, only a few prominent textbooks that deal specifically with public supply management in the U.S. had appeared over the years (e.g., *Public Purchasing and Materials Management* (Page, 1980); three editions of *Government*

Procurement Management (Sherman, 1991)). Since 2000, more of these texts have appeared (e.g., Abramson and Harris, 2003; Cooper, 2003; Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004; Cohen and Eimicke, 2008), perhaps due to increasing recognition of the importance of public procurement (more on this below). Additionally, the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP, discussed below) has recently sponsored the writing of a series of six textbooks on public procurement, which are oriented mainly toward effective supply management practice. We also note that some business-focused texts include a chapter on supply management in the public sector (see for example Burt et al., 2003; Leenders and Fearon, 1997).

There are few peer-reviewed journals that focus on public supply management-related topics in the U.S. The *Journal of Public Procurement* has been published since 2001 by the Public Procurement Research Center (PPRC) at Florida Atlantic University, the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP), described further below, and the U.S. General Services Administration. The National Contract Management Association (NCMA) publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Contract Management* as well as a practitioner-focused publication, *Contract Management Magazine*.

Two other scholarly journals emphasize “specialty” areas of public supply management: the *Public Contract Law Journal*, jointly produced by the American Bar Association and the Government Contract Law Program at George Washington University, and the just-launched *International Journal of Defence Acquisition Management*, a joint effort of the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defence College of Management and Technology in the United Kingdom.

The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), the premier academic and professional association for PA in the U.S., has 20 sections, including sections on the traditional PA functions (i.e., Public Budgeting and Financial Management; Public Law and Administration; Public Personnel Administration), as well as several special interest sections (e.g., Transportation Policy and Administration; Emergency and Crisis Management; Public Affairs Education). ASPA has no section that deals with supply management.

NCMA, mentioned above, is arguably the only scholarly association in the U.S. that focuses on a supply management-related subject in the public context. While NCMA membership and interests extend to the private sector, it is, according to Kelman, more “an organization of government contracting folks than of contractors” (Kelman, 2008).

In terms of scholarly research in public supply management, the largest supply management research activity in the U.S. is CAPS, mentioned above. CAPS, however, lists over 140 corporate sponsors, with the U.S. Postal Service, a quasi-governmental agency, as the only public sector sponsor. The Naval Postgraduate School conducts and coordinates a program of sponsored research

projects, including an annual research symposium, in defence acquisition management and policy. Finally, Florida Atlantic University's Public Procurement Research Center, in partnership with NIGP, conducts a research program and sponsors the biennial International Public Procurement Conference.

In the U.S., two major professional associations should be mentioned for their possible contributions to disciplinary aspects of public supply management. NIGP can be considered the premiere association for government purchasing. Founded in 1944, it provides educational and research programs, technical services and advocacy initiatives to more than 2600 member agencies representing over 16,000 professionals across the United States, as well as Canada and countries outside of North America (NIGP, 2009). The National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO) was founded in 1947 and is made up of the directors of the central purchasing offices in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the territories of the United States (NASPO, 2009).

3.3. Comparing supply management in BA and PA

To summarize (see Table 1), it's clear that supply management is recognized as an important function in both the business and public contexts, as evidenced by the presence of professional associations, journals, and textbooks. That recognition has not, however, translated into academic activities in PA curricula as it has in BA curricula. In light of this uneven treatment, it seems difficult to consider supply management an academic discipline, at least in the public context.

4. Why is supply management less developed in PA?

The neglect of supply management in PA is remarkable in several respects. First, well-known historical accounts repeatedly demonstrate supply management's important role in government operations. To give a few examples: King Solomon's “sourcing strategy” with Hiram of Tyre for key materials to construct the temple in Jerusalem is recounted in the Old Testament book of II Chronicles. Over two millennia later, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 was attributable as much to supply factors (e.g., accessible ports for the English fleet; lack of critical supplies (specifically, seasoned storage barrels) for the Armada; see Mattingly, 1958). Centuries later, the success of large American projects such as the building of the transcontinental railroad (Bain, 2000) and the Panama Canal (McCullough, 1977) depended heavily on successful supply management. More recently, supply management's importance was illustrated in large scale military and relief operations such as the Berlin Airlift (Tusa and Tusa, 1988), the first Gulf War (Pagonis and Cruikshank, 1992), and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Levitt, 2009).

Table 1
Comparison of supply management in BA and PA.

Disciplinary area	Business administration (BA)	Public administration (PA)
<i>University curricula</i>		
Core courses	Supply management routinely covered	Supply management rarely covered
Elective courses	Numerous supply management electives	Few supply management electives
Degree programs	Several supply management degree programs	Few supply management degree programs
<i>Textbooks</i>		
Introductory	Supply management a standard topic	Supply management rarely addressed
Specialty	Several supply management textbooks	Few supply management textbooks
<i>Scholarly journals</i>	Several related to supply management	Few related to supply management
Other disciplinary activities (learned societies, professional associations, research centers/institutes)	Several devoted to supply management	Few devoted to supply management

Second, the sheer magnitude of resources devoted to public procurement compels attention. Scholars estimate that most nations spend roughly 20 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in public procurement (Callendar and Mathews, 2000; Carter and Grimm, 2001), with developing nations spending up to fifty percent of GDP (Schiavo-Campo and Sundaram, 2000, p. 315). In the U.S., federal public procurement during 2009 accounted for over \$500 billion, over thirteen percent of the total federal budget, and of the U.S. states' annual budgets, roughly fifty percent goes toward goods and services procured from the private sector (Harland et al., 2003). As for human resource investments, public procurement professionals at the local, state, and federal levels in the U.S. number more than 500,000 (Carter and Grimm, 2001).

Finally, governments often use procurement as a tool to promote a variety of important public policy objectives (Arrowsmith, 1995; Knight et al., 2003, 2007). These policy objectives include economic goals (e.g., giving preferences for domestic sources of supply), social goals (e.g., giving preferences to historically disadvantaged groups such as women and minorities), and environmental goals (e.g., "green" procurement) (Bolton, 2006). The important role played by public procurement in many nations' stimulus responses to the recent global economic crisis is a compelling and current example of its use as a policy lever. In the U.S., public procurement agencies will execute well over half of the \$790 billion in stimulus spending authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Bartha and Snider, to appear).

All of this evidence of the critical contributions of public supply management has not, however, served to elevate it to a level deemed worthy of coverage in university PA programs. What accounts for this neglect?

4.1. "Identity Issues" in PA—the managerial, legal, and political frames

Some of this condition is no doubt due to the problematical nature of American PA itself (see Waldo, 1978 for a discussion of PA's "identity crisis"). PA's "founding" as a self-aware field of study is often traced to Progressivism and associated reform movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Waldo, 1948). Woodrow Wilson (1887) envisioned PA as a rational business-like endeavor, devoid of any "contaminating" political influences. This normative view was reinforced through various managerial movements such as scientific management (Taylor, 1917), Weber's ideal type bureaucracy (see Gerth and Mills, 1958), and the human relations movement (see Homans, 1969).

Almost simultaneously, Frank Goodnow and others began around 1900 to promote a legal approach to PA (Lynn, 2009). From this perspective, PA's concerns were mainly with applying and enforcing law, which meant that legal and adjudicatory concerns were paramount. Primary bases of action were to be administrative law, constitutional law, and federal and state administrative procedures acts, which govern information (e.g., freedom of information), rule-making, adjudication, enforcement, and open government (i.e., "sunshine") provisions (Dimock, 1980).

In the mid-twentieth century, a new set of PA scholars (e.g., Waldo, 1948; Sayre, 1978; Appleby, 1949) recognized, through empirical study, that public administrators participated deeply in public policy-making; hence PA, despite Wilson's view, could not possibly be devoid of politics. This political framing of PA entailed a different set of values including representativeness, political responsiveness, and accountability to citizens (Rosenbloom, 1998, pp. 27–32).

All three of these perspectives remain influential today, and so the academic field of American PA is characterized by multiple and conflicting views of its own identity and proper role. To illustrate,

consider the question of the proper basis for administrative decision-making. In the managerial view, decisions may be taken on a rational economic basis (e.g., cost–benefit analysis), while from the political perspective, decisions might be made incrementally (Lindblom, 1968), while from the legal view, precedents may rule.

This problem became more complex in the late twentieth century with the advent of a fourth perspective – the New Public Management (NPM; see Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Barzelay, 1992), a reformist offshoot of the traditional managerial approach to PA. NPM emphasizes a "business-like" approach to governing with values such as cost-effectiveness, responsiveness to the citizen as "customer," market preferences (e.g., competition among public entities), and performance measurement (Rosenbloom, 1998, pp. 20–27).

Interestingly, in all the major authors and literature cited in the four perspectives above, supply management concerns figure prominently in only the NPM literature, for example, in discussions on outsourcing, competition, and public–private partnerships. Apparently, NPM's orientation toward business-like government operations translated to increased recognition, at least in the literature, of the importance of supply management. Again, however, this recognition has not yet been reflected in PA academic programs.

To summarize this section, PA as an academic field lacks the sort of unifying perspective and value structure which BA possesses in the perspective and value of profitability. BA has worked out how supply management contributes to profitability, and BA academic programs reflect this relationship. Considering its diverse and competing approaches, PA has been unable to follow suit. We will elaborate further on this point below.

4.2. Public supply management in public budgeting and financial management

At least some of the difference between BA and PA is attributable to the relatively low status of supply management in the public sector. The discussion above indicated that supply management topics are sometimes covered under budgeting and financial management in American PA. According to the traditional view, the budgeting activity entails the planning function for public entities, while supply management activities entail the execution functions. Brudge (1970) illustrates this in his description of the organization of the President's Bureau of the Budget prior to formation of the Office of Management and Budget in the early 1970s. The "Property and Supply Management Branch," which was responsible for "property management, including purchasing and contracting" (p. 54), was under the "General Government Management Division," along with other branches such as data processing and personnel management.

Thus, in this traditional view, budgeting has a strategic focus on organizational ends, while supply management has a routine or clerical emphasis on the means to accomplish those ends (Snider, 2006). (Later, we describe a policy perspective that promotes a strategic role for public supply management professionals.)

4.3. Structural differences between private and public entities: vertical integration

Some of the difference in attention paid by BA and PA to supply management may be explained by the differing extents to which vertical integration is of significant interest in the private and public sectors (see for example Coase, 1937; Chandler, 1964; Arrow, 1974). Among American private firms, vertical integration has been of major interest for well over a century. Carnegie Steel in the 1880s and Ford Motor Company in the 1920s are prominent examples of

firms that owned both their suppliers and buyers. Thus, the aspects of supply management that characterize vertical integration have long been recognized as important in business, and hence in BA.

In contrast, public entities in the U.S. are rarely vertically integrated. Since its founding and with few exceptions (for example, state-owned arsenals and shipyards), the U.S. has as a matter of policy relied on private sector suppliers. Because of this policy preference, the various issues surrounding supply management as it relates to vertical integration are seen as irrelevant, and hence they have not significantly influenced the academic discipline of PA.

4.4. Lack of external influences in PA and faculty hegemony

As a result of the “Reinventing Government” and NPM initiatives during the Clinton Administration in the 1990s, significant attention has been paid to revising traditional buyer–seller relationships between public and private sector entities through means such as outsourcing, public–private competitions, and public–private partnerships (Gansler, 2003). However, the voices of external stakeholders such as public procurement officials are apparently not yet numerous nor strong enough to influence those within the academic discipline of PA to pay much attention to supply management. At present, PA curricula continue to reflect the hegemony of its academic members’ ideologies, the great majority of which do not include views of supply management as an important or interesting subject.

4.5. Differences between the “bottom line” and the “public interest”

Fry and Nigro (1998) argue, consistent with the discussion above, that management in the public sector differs from management in the private sector in a number of significant and interrelated ways. First, the public sector is characterized by ambiguous goals. Public administrators have no profit criterion upon which to base their decisions and actions; rather, they must use the vague notion of “the public interest” (Cohen and Eimicke, 2008, pp. 23–25). Ambiguity is exacerbated by the often wide scope and impact of governmental activities. Demands for and competing ideas of equity and fairness muddy the waters.

Second, in light of multiple, diverse, vague, and intangible objectives, success often becomes a matter of legitimacy. As Fry and Nigro put it, “administrators are held responsible less for what they produce than how they produce it” (p. 1179).

Finally, the public sector is characterized by bureaucratic management, defined by myriad legal, regulatory, political, and managerial constraints. In such an operating environment, administrators’ discretion is limited, and they quite necessarily adopt cautionary and risk-averse attitudes and actions.

This represents a major reason for differences in the development of supply management as a discipline in BA and PA. In contrast to supply management in business, public supply management is not generally perceived to contribute to strategic criteria of success in the public sector. Indeed, there are no well-defined agreed-upon strategic success factors for public supply management; rather there are multiple goals and perhaps a vague notion of the public interest (Schiavo-Campo and Sundaram, 2000). Thus, supply management continues to be perceived mainly as a routine, tactical function and thus as unworthy of the sorts of activities that lead to and accompany disciplinary status.

Several writers (e.g., Gordon et al., 2000; Snider, 2006) have noted this condition regarding public procurement, though others (e.g., McCue and Gianakis, 2001; Matthews, 2005; Rendon, 2005) see some trends indicating that public procurement is becoming more of a strategic function. Again, however, these trends do not include academic programs in PA.

4.6. Public supply management: the future?

On the whole, the various explanations presented above indicate that the main barriers to supply management’s further development in PA have to do with PA issues, not supply management issues. The differences between BA and PA are sufficiently substantial so as to inhibit supply management’s consistent progress as an academic discipline in both fields.

Absent initiatives by leaders of supply management theory and practice to address this disparity between BA and PA, we see no major changes on the horizon. Alternatively, those in supply management could choose to promote disciplinary activities targeted specifically at the public sector. Clearly, such activities would focus on the unique features of public supply management that set it apart from supply management in general. What might those features look like?

In spite of its ambiguous nature, the public interest may indeed constitute a suitable strategic concept or theme around which public supply management can be configured so as to demonstrate a strategic character worthy of disciplinary activities. If so, then for public supply management to be viewed as strategic, it must be seen as contributing substantially to the public interest.

We suggest the public interest also because we seek a single overarching value similar to profitability in the private sector. We have noted the problems with PA’s diverse and possibly conflicting approaches and values. If these all may be captured, at least notionally, under the value of the public interest, it may be possible to finesse the issue, especially if the public interest may be operationalized properly (more on this below). Certainly, as noted above, public procurement theorists have identified several possible relevant values or policy objectives such as transparency, accountability, value for money, and probity (Arrowsmith, 1995; Knight et al., 2007). Any or all of these could be considered as potential strategic goals, but again, some may be competing or inconsistent (e.g., efficiency and accountability are sometimes difficult goals to reconcile.). However, they also all may be viewed as falling under the overarching value of the public interest.

Such a change to a strategic character for public supply management would correspond to the sort of paradigm shift described by Kuhn (1970) in which a discipline’s outdated theories and practices are called into question and replaced by new ideas and approaches more suitable to the times. Under such a shift, scholars and practitioners would begin developing concepts and tools that address supply management’s contributions to the public interest. As these are developed, greater attention will be paid to public supply management in the forms of research activities, scholarly publications, dedicated academic courses and programs, and scholarly associations. Supply management would then progress as a discipline in the public realm.

In the remainder of this paper, we investigate ways in which public supply management may be conceptualized as contributing in more tangible ways to the public interest.

5. PA, the public interest, and public supply management

In this section, we document some PA-related literature on the public interest which helps mitigate some of its ambiguity.

5.1. The public interest in American PA

In 1936, E. Pendleton Herring made a strong case that the idea of the public interest should be central to the new field’s identity. In his view, a large, competent, and responsive public

administration was the only viable counterweight to a legislature that, at the time, was dominated by special interest groups (Herring, 1936, p. vii).

Despite Herring's call, however, the public interest as a guiding precept for American PA has remained problematic due to its ambiguous meaning, as noted above. In an influential critique, Schubert (1957) concluded that "the public interest notion is close to useless in the development [of PA as] a true social science" (Goodsell, 1990, p. 98). Through the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, the public interest as a central theme became "more clouded, more fragmented, less easy to know and act upon and, hence, it became a subject few public administration theorists addressed" (Stillman, 1985, p. 114).

5.2. Recovering the public interest as a verbal symbol

Notwithstanding its fall from favor in scholarly PA circles, Goodsell (1990, p. 97) points out that, throughout the 20th century, the public interest remained an important implicit normative consideration in administrative practice. Further, he documents that it remained a topic of vital interest in other disciplines such as political science and economics (pp. 98–102). Working from this literature, Goodsell develops a model of the public interest which he contends is applicable to and useful in contemporary PA. He argues that, while the public interest is obviously a political symbol, it is also a verbal symbol that makes its impact in public discourse. He proposes a model of six rules or values that are reinforced by the verbal symbol "the public interest":

- (1) *Legality–morality*—conformity to ethical and legal standards; opposition to corruption, graft, waste, and abuse
- (2) *Political responsiveness*—conformity to overriding wishes of citizens and relevant groups
- (3) *Political consensus*—seeking common ground and community
- (4) *Concern for logic*—articulating purposes; indicating how proposed actions advance those purposes; and demonstrating that proposed actions are reasonable and coherent
- (5) *Concern for effects*—forward thinking; taking the "long view"
- (6) *Agenda awareness*—concern for unarticulated societal needs (pp. 102–111).

Goodsell shows how the public administration, because of its functions, processes, structures, and ethos, may embody and disseminate these values into the political system (p. 112).

5.3. Incorporating the public interest in public supply management

We argued earlier that, in order for supply management to move toward disciplinary status, public supply management must be seen as contributing to the public interest in the same way that supply management contributes to profitability in the private sector. Goodsell's framework provides a useful means for conceptualizing about public supply management's connections to the public interest. Specifically, following his arguments, by infusing public supply management-related discourse with the verbal symbol "the public interest," the six values become more prominently inserted into its policy and managerial processes. It follows that the greater the extent of this discourse, the more public supply management may become associated with these values.

In essence, a necessary condition for public supply management to be seen as embodying the public interest is for it to begin "speaking" that way. To be more precise, those in public supply management must begin using the verbal symbol

"the public interest" in connection with their various roles and responsibilities.

Of course, such discourse is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for public supply management to be seen as closely connected and contributing to the public interest. The public interest values must also be evident in its policy and practice. We address this issue in the following section.

6. Supply management and the public interest: public supply policy

The nature of the six public interest values discussed above raises important questions regarding the potentially expansive scope of the public interest as it might be sought in public supply management. For example, to what extent must public supply management professionals engage in politics in order to achieve "political consensus"? What boundary spanning activities must they pursue to achieve "political responsiveness"? What means may they employ to obtain "agenda awareness"? The values also indicate the importance of substantive considerations as well as procedural ones in pursuing the public interest. Providing clear answers for such questions and issues lie beyond this paper's scope. Here we can only sketch a general outline for a policy-oriented approach that may provide a basis for further and more detailed investigations.

6.1. A framework for analysis

In investigating ways in which public supply management can contribute to the public interest, it will be useful to discuss how supply management activities are integrated in public policy-making. For this purpose we use a framework (Fig. 1) developed for studying public procurement policy (Snider and Rendon, 2008). This model incorporates concepts from: (1) the policy sciences (Sharkansky, 1970), (2) other public supply policy models (Thai, 2001; Harland et al., 2000), and (3) important research on public procurement as a lever for furthering policy objectives (Arrowsmith, 1995; Knight et al., 2003, 2007).

The model uses an open systems construct of inputs, conversion processes (in this case, public supply policy), outputs, and feedback (Easton, 1965). It depicts policy/conversion elements for the unit of analysis (e.g., a municipal government, a school district, or a procurement agency) for two policy types – structural and allocative (Salisbury and Heinz, 1970) – each of which receives particular inputs from the environment.

Structural policies are also labeled "meta-policies" since they govern and regulate other policy-making. Examples of structural procurement policies include laws and regulations, decision-making authorities, and resources such as procurement staffs and support organizations. These serve as part of the external environment for and provide inputs to allocative policies. Allocative policies are actions and decisions that allocate value to a particular group, such as a decision to award a contract to a particular vendor.

Outputs of allocative and structural policies vary accordingly. Outputs of structural policies occur as those policies are applied in allocative policies, as when a policy favoring small businesses is enacted with a contract award to a small business. Structural policy outputs are thus deferred and evident in outputs of allocative policies. For allocative policies, outputs may be judged using metrics directly associated with the effectiveness of the item or service procured, or they may be ancillary results such as facilities and jobs that the procurement creates.

The model includes an intermediate stage – outcomes – between outputs and impact. This emphasizes that higher-order

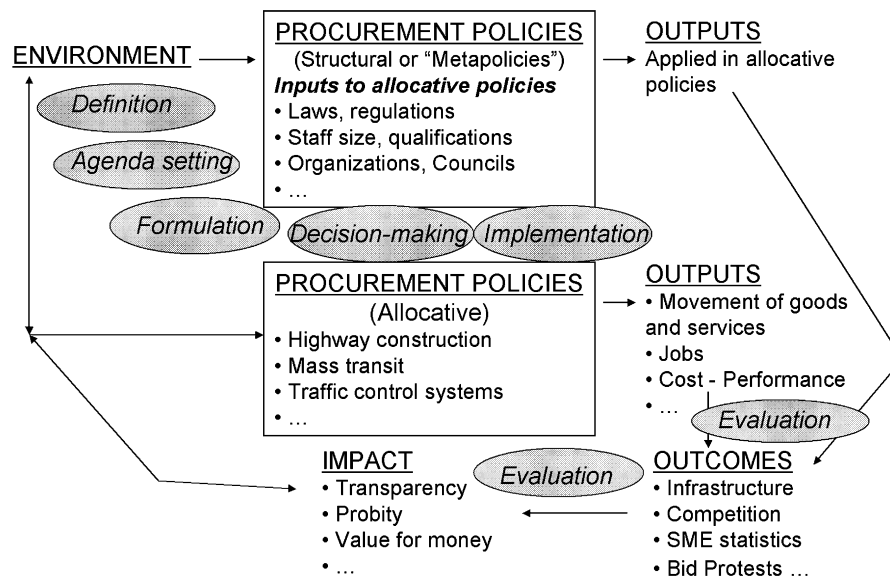


Fig. 1. Framework for procurement policy—transportation infrastructure example (from Snider and Rendon, 2008)

results, such as effective transportation infrastructure and competition are functions both of allocative and of structural policy outputs. Finally, “impact” corresponds to even higher-order effects such as transparency, probity, value-for-money, and sustainability. The relevant procurement environment reflects the extent to which such impacts are manifested.

The framework includes the stages of the policy-making process (Lasswell, 1956) because of their correspondence with the “flow” of the systems model. The definition and agenda setting stages align with the depiction of inputs that flow from the environment. Formulation, decision-making, and implementation correspond roughly to the conversion element, and evaluation figures in determinations of outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Depicting these stages adds granularity to the basic systems model by calling attention to the types of activities associated with each of its elements.

Obviously, the process for making specific allocative policies will differ from that for making specific structural policies (the process for allocative policy-making is closely tied to the procurement process (see for example McCue and Gianakis, 2001, p. 77)). The processes for the two policy types will necessarily be intertwined, as allocative policies must account for relevant structural policies and vice versa (Snider and Rendon, 2008, p. 321).

While this model appears to emphasize policy-making – perhaps to the exclusion of other strategic considerations such as legal processes or managerial decision-making – we take a robust view of policy-making as encompassing a broad range of authoritative decisions and actions of, in this case, public supply managers. Thus, the model would accommodate, for example, decisions considered and taken as part of administrative rule-making, or decisions and actions towards a strategic supplier.

6.2. Applying the framework—public supply management as a tactical function

As previously discussed, supply management in PA is typically covered under budgeting and financial management. In the traditional view, budgeting is the strategic function, while supply management is relegated to the routine or clerical function. Public budgeting functions as the maker of strategies, policies, and programs, while supply management merely implements them.

In terms of our framework, public supply management at present is concerned mainly with the implementation stage of the policy-making process. Further, since it is concerned mainly with implementation, it is focused on allocative policies than structural policies. That is, it is concerned with executing specific procurement actions, rather than with the making of broader policies that shape, enable, or constrain how those actions are executed.

6.3. Re-orienting public supply management from tactical to strategic

When one considers the six public interest values described earlier, it should be clear that most if not all operate in all stages in the policy-making process. Thus, public supply management cannot fully embody these values if it is focused mainly on policy implementation. Rather, it must re-orient its perspective to include all stages of the policy process. Similarly, it must re-orient its focus to include structural as well as allocative policies.

In what ways would this re-orientation contribute to promotion of the public interest and its values? Perhaps most critically, public supply professionals would be adept at working across organizational and institutional boundaries to negotiate the public interest with other stakeholders in order to move the policy-making process forward. Additionally, they would participate in the early stages (policy definition, agenda setting, and formulation) in order to represent the public interest in a complex and uncertain environment. They would also understand and be able to articulate how desired environmental effects (e.g., transparency, sustainability) may be promoted through various policies and policy outcomes. They would be able to put in place adequate evaluation measures to determine the extent to which desired policy outcomes and impacts are achieved, and to adapt new and revised policies accordingly. They would be able to contribute to development of a proper set of structural policies that frame allocative policy-making according to the public interest. Many other possibilities could be envisioned.

This new perception requires, again, a paradigm shift for public supply management professionals from being merely implementers of public policy, through execution of allocative policies, but also active participants and even proponents of supply management in the earlier stages of the public policy making process,

through the participation in the development of structural policies. Just as in the business administration sector where supply management professionals re-oriented themselves to promote supply management considerations in the development of corporate organizational and competitive strategy, public supply management professionals must also take the initiative and push supply management considerations in the early stages of public policy making process. This new perspective of supply management professionals will help prove the value of supply management in the development and formulation of public policy and give it the strategic character it currently lacks.

7. Conclusion: initial steps

Earlier we suggested that the type of re-orientation described above would not occur absent initiatives by public supply management leaders. While these initiatives could take several forms, we take it as axiomatic that a key component would be an aggressive and broad-based program of directed scholarly and practitioner-based research, perhaps under a consortium of associations and institutions such as ISM, NIGP, PPRC, and ASPA. (The International Research Study of Public Procurement (see Knight et al., 2003) may provide an exemplar for this type of effort.)

The main thrust of such a research program, at least initially, would be to investigate and document public supply management's contributions to the public interest, broadly defined, at various levels of governmental administration. Many research questions could be posed: What are the various problems presented by the environment which are most amenable to melioration through public supply? What consultative and collaborative means are most effective for negotiating consensus on various policy alternatives? What are the relationships between structural and allocative policies? Certainly, the methods by which public supply management professionals can promote supply management considerations in the early stages of the policy process is an area worthy of research. To the extent such promotion is possible, it would help to elevate supply management to a strategic level in PA.

A particularly important area of research would seek to reduce ambiguity surrounding the idea of the public interest, thereby making public supply management's contributions more tangible. Such research would focus on how to measure the achievement of various aspects of the public interest amid the multiple and amorphous goals that characterize the public sector. Desired policy impacts such as transparency, accountability, probity, and value for money are certainly indicators of achievements in support of public interest. How might these policy impacts be measured? For example, many public procurement organizations are required to keep statistics regarding awards given to small businesses and firms owned by historically disadvantaged groups. These metrics indicate the extent to which public organizations are promoting a particular aspect of the public interest. What other metrics might be developed for other aspects of the public interest?

A follow-on research program might address the policy-analytical and managerial competencies required by "strategic" public supply managers. The results would provide a basis for educational and training materials for university and professional curricula in public supply management. Some of these required competencies may align very well with those reflected in MPA programs, and public supply management courses and concentrations may find homes in those programs.

The specifics of how this re-orienting of public supply management from tactical to strategic perspectives by means of

the public interest remain to be worked out. Clearly, it must begin with the resources at hand: existing professional societies, academic conferences, journals, and scholars. Again, of particular importance will be the work of scholars who must develop the intellectual underpinnings for public supply management and the public interest; these underpinnings will have a wide reach into textbooks, conferences, and programs of education and training.

We anticipate that current promising streams of research will continue, perhaps in connection with our policy framework. For example, various related theories from economics (e.g., mechanism design (Hurwicz and Reiter, 2006); game theory (Myerson, 1997); principal-agent models (Laffont and Martimort, 2002)) may provide sound bases for policy-making, especially in the crafting of effective structural policies.

If this transformation of public supply management takes place, an added benefit should be the "spill-over effect" as its research, best practices, and lessons learned carry over to BA as well as the business management sector. Only until this transformation occurs and the synergies take effect in supply management, can it attain disciplinary status. Given the current state of public supply management, we're not optimistic that this reorientation to the strategic view will occur in the foreseeable future. However, such a move will be necessary if supply management is to become a discipline.

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